

# Willing and action

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## Abstract

Why did Hannah Arendt, in her book on *The Life of the Mind*, select thinking, willing and judging as the basic faculties of the mind in preference to some others which might be equally plausible? Why did she conceptualise these three faculties as autonomous, each being an activity with its own features, self-motivation and self-determination? If willing is necessarily bound with freedom, what does it indicate about the constraints of freedom in political actions? In this article, I am addressing these questions and attempting to explore them in relation to political psychology. In contrast to Arendt's perspective, one can discern different forms of willing in political actions, such as those between minorities and majorities, in single individuals and in masses where willing is often displayed as a 'collective will'.

## Keywords

willing, thinking, political action, liberty and the construction of freedom, Serge Moscovici

## Introduction

Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* presents a rich and complex range of ideas and themes that one can pursue from a variety of perspectives. For example, one may go along with the author's interpretations of perspectives and reflections on ideas projected throughout history and appreciate her outstanding insights. As Moors (1980, p. 229) commented, throughout the two volumes of this book, Arendt practised 'true thought' in searching for meanings, and not for solutions of problems she raised. To provide solutions to those problems 'would be tantamount to vitiating the entire enterprise' (Moors, 1980, p. 229). On the other hand, one may not be inclined to accept the role of a spectator of Arendt's ideas, and instead, focus on some issues that raise difficulties because they are hard to understand. In this article, I shall take the latter approach, and I propose to

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foreground some issues that I find troublesome. I conceive the two volumes of *The Life of the Mind* as Arendt's

- Interpretations of histories of thinking and willing as they were conceived by philosophers over centuries,
- Displays of some preliminary ideas about judging and
- Internal dialogues with these three kinds of faculties (activities).

After the publication of *The Life of the Mind*, the three mental faculties or activities, thinking, willing and judging, received different attention. Thinking was discussed and commented upon most, followed by judging, while willing was mostly avoided, or commented upon briefly, or viewed as controversial. Bernstein (1978) characterised the two volumes as an ambitious investigation of thinking, and an even more ambitious and complex exploration of willing.

My first encounter with *The Life of the Mind* led me to ponder several questions. First, why did Arendt select thinking, willing and judging as the basic faculties of the mind in preference to some others? Since her approach to the study of the mind takes, broadly speaking, the perspective of philosophical phenomenology, could other faculties (or activities), for example, memory, intersubjectivity, consciousness and imagination, be equally plausible? Second, she explained that she called these three activities basic because they are autonomous (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 70). They are totally independent of one another, each being an activity with own features, self-motivation and self-determination. In view of this, what does the autonomy of the three basic activities imply about the nature of the Mind? Third, if willing is necessarily bound with freedom, what does it indicate about constraints of freedom in political actions? Finally, concepts, such as the mind, knowledge, thinking, willing and judgement, among many others, have specific meanings in Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*. Therefore, one needs to take a great deal of care in interpreting meanings of these concepts because they may considerably differ from those that one would attribute to psychological meanings. The lack of attention to this would lead to misconstructions of her ideas.

One cannot address these questions properly without understanding Arendt's political concerns. In the Introduction to *Thinking*, Arendt (1978, I) explains that her preoccupation with mental activities stems from her experience in Eichmann's trial and from the arising moral questions. While she clarifies and justifies her concern with thinking, or rather, with *thoughtlessness*, she only poses the question about willing: 'Is evil-doing (the sin of omission as well as the sin of commission) possible in default of not just "base motives" (as the law calls them) but of any motives whatever, of any particular prompting of interest in volition?' (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 4). Although Arendt does not answer this question in detail, one can derive plausible answers from reading *The Life of the Mind*. One possible answer suggests that it would be hard to find faculties more antagonistic than thinking and willing as conceived in these two volumes, though the nature of their exact relations is left unclear. She explained their antagonism in the Conclusion of *Willing*, where she analysed in detail Nietzsche's and Heidegger's positions and their reversals on willing, and where she presented some of Bergson's views on the subject. She stated that according to

Nietzsche and Heidegger, thinking and willing are not only two different faculties, but they are opposites in their ‘deadly conflict’. This clash occurs ‘when the two-in-one of consciousness actualized in the silent language between me and myself changes its original harmony and friendship into an ongoing conflict between will and counter-will, between command and resistance’ (Arendt, II, p. 179). This is, Arendt adds, what was going on throughout history. *Judging* is announced at the end of *Willing* as the faculty capable of overcoming this impasse, but unfortunately, we can only speculate on its role.

## The clash between thinking and willing

Arendt stated at the beginning of the volume on *Willing* that her project was devoted to the problem of freedom. Through her historical perspective on willing, Arendt argued that most philosophers denied the existence of willing precisely because willing could not be dissociated from freedom, and therefore, it has been viewed as a redundant concept. If willing cannot be dissociated from freedom, one has no need to speak about it. Even modern philosophers such as Ryle or Wittgenstein thought that willing was an unnecessary concept. Arendt (1978, II, p. 5), in contrast, found willing just as vital as Bergson’s ‘immediate datum of consciousness’, or Kant’s I-think or Descartes’ cogito. Above all, she believed that humans *experience* willing directly and that political life would be impossible without actions of the will. And yet, Arendt raised the question of the relation between political freedom, action and the will only at the end of the last section of *Willing*.

## *Willing and thinking as independent faculties of the mind*

To understand Arendt’s project on willing throughout its historical-philosophical journey, one must consider willing in opposition to thinking. Bernstein (1978) observed that Arendt’s aim was not to present a history of ideas of willing, but of human experiences that led to the discovery of inwardness and of willing. Compared to thinking, willing has a short history. Ancient Greeks did not have the concept of willing, although they distinguished between voluntary and involuntary acts, such as murder and manslaughter, and between what was potential and actual. Willing emerged in Christianity in the first century, Arendt contended, which coincided with the newly attained experience of inwardness, a discovery made by St Paul. From experiences of inwardness, a problem arose how to reconcile willing in humans with the Will of the God. Once this problem was created, individuals had to cope with the struggle of how to resolve dilemmas between different possibilities of acting inspired by the manifold manifestations of the will. These internal conflicts of the self with oneself exposed themselves as restlessness and uncertainty. The story of willing, which started with the internal conflicts of St Paul, continued its path through the thoughts of Augustine, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, to post-mediaeval philosophers, who rejected willing as an illusion (e.g. Spinoza).

The aim of willing is to achieve concrete goals and so to create projects for the future. Arendt characterised willing as the single ‘spring of action’ (Arendt, 1978, II, pp. 101; 140; 155) arising within the individual independently of the external world. Willing expresses freedom to choose unlimited kinds of activities, and it actualises its possibilities

through the capacity to imagine the not-yet existing projects. In other words, willing is a mental organ for the future and for creating uncertainty about outcomes of future events. Note that I follow Arendt here in using phrases such as ‘will expresses freedom’ and ‘will actualises its possibilities’, rather than saying that ‘the individual expresses the freedom of will’ or that ‘the individual actualises its possibilities’.

In contrast to willing, thinking can take place only when the individual is in a state of tranquillity, undisturbed by the external world. Thinking is a solitary and serene experience of the individual who carries internal dialogues with oneself, and in harmony with oneself, which Arendt describes as the ‘two-in-one’. Arendt’s internal dialogues have no concrete aim. They are concerned with the search for meanings of unanswerable questions of a general nature, for example, of invisible objects of experience, beauty, life and death. Thinking is orientated towards present and past experiences; it is a spectator’s outlook associated with passivity. Thinking, as the faculty of reasoning, does not allow contradictions, and its search for meanings is restricted to rational apprehension of appearances of the world.

Due to their differences, there is ‘a basic conflict between the experiences of the thinking ego and those of the willing ego’ (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 4). The antagonism between them is such that these two mental activities, that is, the thinking ego and the willing ego, ‘seem unable to co-exist’ (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 35). However, just like in some other places in *The Life of the Mind*, I find it difficult to decide whether, in making this suggestion, Arendt expressed her own position or whether she reflected on the position of other philosophers. She discussed the issue of the thinking ego and the willing ego as unable to co-exist in the context of classical Greek philosophy. Considering that according to Arendt, classical Greek philosophy did not have the concept of willing, I understand that the claim that these two mental activities ‘seem unable to co-exist’ expresses Arendt’s own view.

History moves forward because willing, which is a mental organ for the future, actualises its possibilities, while thinking is orientated towards the past; all thoughts are after-thoughts (Arendt, I, 78, 87, 190). Orientation to time forms the major antagonism between willing and thinking in the history of philosophy. Arendt was not the only philosopher claiming that the Greeks did not have a concept of willing which implied freedom, novelty and temporality. Michael Bakhtin (1981) made a similar observation with respect to ancient Greek romantic novels lacking the concept of temporality. For ancient Greeks, both space and time were reversible. This meant that the story that took place in Babylon could just as well happen in Egypt or Byzantium. Time sequences were arbitrary, and events could follow in any order in a storyline because they were not driven by inward willing. According to Bakhtin’s analysis, ancient Greek literature did not depict an individual’s private life except for minor genres and routines (for details, see Marková et al., 2020).

### *Hegel on thinking and willing as interdependent activities of the mind*

Throughout the history of willing, Arendt observed that only few modern philosophers recognised willing as a faculty of the mind, as an activity of freedom, and as a significant

future-orientated activity. Among them, a special place belonged to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel. In the section on 'Hegel's solution: the philosophy of history', [Arendt \(1978, II, p. 39\)](#) commented: 'No philosopher has described the willing ego in its clash with the thinking ego with greater sympathy, insight, and consequence for the history of thought than Hegel'. This claim could be quite surprising for readers of Hegel because they would be unlikely to see the clash between the willing ego and the thinking ego in the way Arendt did. Hegel insisted on the importance of willing as a future-orientated activity, which had priority over the past; time finds its reality in the future. The mind copes with time only by virtue of the will. Nevertheless, Arendt commented that it was evident that Hegel ultimately failed 'to reconcile the two mental activities, thinking and willing, with their opposing time concepts' ([Arendt, 1978, II, p. 47](#)), although she added that Hegel would have disagreed with her judgment. Arendt's argument is very complex for a 'non-professional thinker'. In this context, Arendt referred to [Koyré's \(1934/2018\)](#) little known essay on Hegel's dialectic of time. The dialectic of time is a dialectic of the human mind, in and through which humans project themselves into 'the yet-to-come'. This is what makes the concepts of the future and of history possible. However, as Arendt stated, neither Hegel nor Koyré had spoken in the context of time about free will or about the clash between thinking and willing.

Let us make several comments on Arendt's observation.

First, as Koyré showed, for Hegel, Spirit (Mind) is historical, and throughout time, it develops. Hegel's concept of time is a dialectic movement: 'For it is only because spirit is temporal and time dialectical that a dialectic of the spirit is possible. Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of time, in its deepest intuitions, and through it, a philosophy of man' ([Koyré 1934/2018, p. 385](#)). Therefore, Hegel's time is the time of humans, who constantly deny the present, in their search to realise themselves in the future. For Hegel, this dialectical movement consisted of the relation between the finite and the infinite, and the unrest involved in that relation. Unrest in Hegel's dialectic posed itself as a transformation from finite to infinite, limited to unlimited and from determined into undetermined. Koyré (1934/2018, p. 392) explained that 'Hegelian spirit is time and Hegelian time is spirit'.

Neither Koyré nor Hegel were occupied with the clash between thinking and willing because Arendt's problem was not their problem. Hegel's question about time was concerned with human history, and with its development: willing was a feature of history. Hegel's concepts of thinking and of willing were different from those of Arendt, and therefore, it is not clear what 'the clash between thinking and willing' would mean to him. Arendt reduced her argument about the clash between thinking and willing in Hegel to temporality, which was her main concern. Hegel emphasised the future, but one cannot be *willing* any future states without first *thinking* about them. But in a different context, this was what Arendt claimed as well. For example, although she did not establish any hierarchical order between thinking, willing and judging, she argued that an order of priorities among these faculties existed ([Arendt, 1978, p. 76](#)): 'It is inconceivable how we could ever be able to will or to judge, that is, to handle things which are not yet and things that are no more' without first thinking about them. It is thinking that 'though unable to move the will or provide judgment with general rules, must prepare the particulars given to the senses in such a way that the mind is able to handle them in their absence; it must, in

brief, *de-sense* them' (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 76–77, Arendt's emphasis). While thinking in its search for meaning is concerned with unanswerable general questions, willing and judging are occupied with particulars and therefore, with the world of appearances (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 213). De-sensing as the activity of thinking means withdrawal from 'what is present and close at hand' (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 199). Instead, it deals with 'essences' or with what is generally meaningful:

thinking always 'generalises', squeezes out of many particulars ... Generalisation is inherent in every thought even though that thought is insisting on the universal primacy of the particular. In other words, the 'essential' is applicable everywhere...The thinking ego, moving among universals, among invisible essences, is, strictly speaking, nowhere; it is homeless in an emphatic sense (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 199).

Willing, in contrast to thinking, while it is also concerned with things that are absent from senses, makes them the projects for the future. But if one only wills and judges objects and events about which one was thinking, it could imply that willing and judging are not as independent faculties of the mind as Arendt claimed.

Second, for Hegel, there could not be any clash between thinking and willing because, for him, these activities were part of the same faculty of the mind in their dialectic development. Although Hegel did not discuss free will systematically, in various writings, he paid attention to free will and thinking. For example, in his *Philosophy of Right* (Hegel, 1991), in paragraphs 4–5, he considered the Mind (Spirit) as thought in general:

it must not be imagined that a human being thinks on the one hand and wills on the other, and that he has thought in one pocket and volition in the other, for this would be an empty representation. The distinction between thought and will is simply that between theoretical and practical attitudes. But they are not two separate faculties; on the contrary the will is a particular way of thinking -thinking translating itself into existence, thinking as the drive to give itself existence (Hegel, 1991, p. 35).

Arendt, of course, was familiar with Hegel's writing, but she did not appear to pay any attention to his views on thinking and willing, probably because she was fully concentrated on what she thought was their clash with respect to temporality.

Third, the Spirit or the Mind in Hegel (1807/1977) refers to a transition from the individual's subjective mind towards the knowledge of the Absolute Spirit in its religious, cultural, and historical contexts. It is an ascending journey during which the Mind, throughout its dialectic struggles, gradually discards the less adequate forms of knowledge and substitutes them by more adequate forms (Marková, 1982, Chapter 8). The German 'Geist' can be translated into English either as the 'Mind' or the 'Spirit' but the latter, allowing for more cultural senses, as in the phrase Spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*), seems preferable (Redding, 2020). Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* is concerned with the Mind as, in her understanding, it was expressed by philosophers throughout history, although she appreciated the importance of the interaction between activities of the Mind and culture. Arendt's and Hegel's concepts of the Mind tackle different questions and

consequently, these two scholars had different priorities in interpreting willing. Will as a project for the future is common to them both, but Arendt's problem of the Will and Freedom led to an abyss, while Hegel's concept of the Will and Freedom (e.g. [Hegel, 1991](#), p. 401) referred to 'being with oneself in another': it meant:

relating to something other than oneself in such a way that this other becomes integrated into one's projects, completing and fulfilling them so that it counts as belonging to one's own action rather than standing over against it. This means that freedom is possible only to the extent that we act rationally, and in circumstances where the objects of our action are in harmony with our reason ([Wood Allen, 1991](#), p. xii).

## The thinking ego, the willing ego and the self

Arendt strictly separated the basic faculties of the mind (thinking, willing and judging) from all other faculties, such as emotions, passions, feelings and other mental states that humans 'suffer'. Such mental states, she argued, that belong to the private self are not available for public display, and psychology cannot say much about them. These mental states are passions and emotions of the soul, and they have the same status as inner organs, neither of which can be publicly inspected. What is available to the senses are appearances only, and the individual, being aware of the differences between inner states and public displays, and in reflecting on social norms and on her-/himself, can decide how she/he wishes to appear to others. Psychology, in [Arendt's \(1978, I, p. 35\)](#) view, can tell us nothing 'more than the ever changing moods, the ups and downs of our psychic life, and its results and discoveries are neither particularly appealing nor very meaningful in themselves'. Passions have their own self-expressiveness, for example, we blush with shame or embarrassment, grow pale with fear, and we may find it difficult to control publicly the expressions which belong to the soul, and which, therefore, must be decisively distinguished from the mind.

In acknowledging Arendt's distinction between the mind and the soul, what can we understand by notions such as 'thinking ego', 'willing ego' and 'judging ego', which refer to activities of the mind, each following its own independent strategy?

Arendt's perspective that the three basic activities of the mind are autonomous, and each determines its own rules and strategies, created for her some difficulties because it is 'the same person whose mind thinks, wills and judges' ([Arendt, 1978, I, p. 70](#)). Despite this difficulty of which she was aware, she insisted that these activities could not be unified in any way, and she was critical of philosophical monism that rejected the multifaceted nature of the mind: 'What is so remarkable in all these theories and doctrines is their implicit monism, the claim that. . . behind the obvious plurality of man's faculties and abilities, there must exist a oneness' ([Arendt, 1978, I, p. 70](#)). Arendt followed Nietzsche in contending that willing never does anything for its own sake, but always has a project for the future. In willing-something, willing changes itself into doing-it. The success of the project, however, cannot be guaranteed. This causes impatience, disquiet and worry because the will's project which presupposes I-can, may not succeed: 'The



will's worrying disquiet can be stilled only by the I-can-and-I-do, that is, by a cessation of its own activity and release of the mind from its dominance' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 37).

Being aware of the difficulty in theorising the fragmented nature of the mind in which the thinking ego, willing ego and judging ego each followed their own strategies, and of the fact that it was 'the same person whose mind thinks, wills and judges', how did Arendt relate this fragmented nature of the mind to the self?

On the one hand, these three faculties of the mind make humans unique and fragmented (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 69, 129). The thinking ego and the willing ego are produced independently of the external world of appearances; both kinds of internal dialogue, that is the two-in-one in thinking, and I-will and I-nil in willing, take place in the individual only, and this is what makes the individual a unique human being.

On the other hand, these three faculties manifest themselves in the same person through consciousness, that is, through 'an awareness of the sameness of the I am... which guarantees the identical continuity of a self throughout manifold representations, experiences and memories of the lifetime' (Arendt, 1978, I, 74). In sympathy with Kant's (1914) theory of judgment, Arendt recognised that judgment could not take place without considering the actions of others. 'Others' must be brought into judgement in and through adopting Kant's 'enlarged mentality' (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 94).

If we accept that in following Kant, Arendt expressed her own position, we have, in her theorising, both the concept of the fragmented self and of the self with continuity throughout its manifold representations. Some of Arendt's followers found this double perspective of the self as troublesome, particularly in relation to willing (Jacobitti, 1988; 1996). How should one understand the spontaneity of the will on the one hand, and the will as creating the self's character (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 215; II, p. 195), on the other? In other words, the spontaneity of the will, or 'the spring of action' and individualisation realises itself in concrete projects. Willing, however, fashions the Self 'into an "enduring I" that directs all particular acts of volition. It creates the self's character' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 195).

Some commentators found this double nature of the will ambiguous and could not understand how to read Arendt on this issue. Honig (1988) insisted that both Jacobitti (1988) and Young-Bruehl (1982) made a mistake in placing emphasis on the will's creating the self's character. Honig claimed that Arendt was not expressing her view but was critical on this point of other philosophers to whom she referred in the historical treatment of willing. I am inclined to adopt the interpretation of Jacobitti and Young-Bruehl because there are other instances in *The Life of the Mind* where Arendt clearly refers to action, or more precisely, to a political action, where some continuity of the self is required. In a political action, will must be much more than the 'mood of the willing ego ... impatience, disquiet, and worry (Sorge)' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 37) because 'a We is always engaged in changing our common world' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 200).

Arendt stated in 'Postscriptum' to *Thinking*, that she followed willing in two ways (Arendt, 1978, I, pp. 213–215). On the one hand, willing is an organ of spontaneity 'that interrupts all causal chains of motivation that would bind it' (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 213). On the other hand, 'it is the will whose subject matter is projects, not objects, which in a sense creates the person that can be blamed or praised and anyhow held responsible not merely



for its actions but for its whole “Being”, its character’ (Arendt, 1978, I, pp. 214–215). Will’s projects for the future presuppose an I-can, but their success is by no means guaranteed because actions require commitment, responsibility and adopting ethical principles. All these restrict the individual freedom of acting as one wills.

Arendt’s double position with respect to the self could encourage psychology to reconsider the relation between the continuity of the self on the one hand and the fragmented and unique self on the other hand. Rather than treating continuity and discontinuity as either-or phenomena, one may view them as dialectically connected forms of a multifaceted self. These forms are embedded in social, historical, and political environments in which the will, and its transformation into action, takes different routes.

## Will, action and freedom

Although the notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘action’ percolated through Arendt’s writing for most of her career, I shall rely here on their use in *The Life of the Mind* with respect to willing. This is not only to avoid discussing the different uses of ‘freedom’ and ‘action’ throughout the trajectory of Arendt’s thought, but also to bring forward the question of the relevance of their meanings in *The Life of the Mind* for political psychology.

Having had insisted at the beginning of *Willing* that willing cannot be considered without reference to freedom, in the last section of that volume, Arendt turned to this question in politics.

### *The political and the social*

Politics was Arendt’s life-long concern. To be in politics, one must act as a citizen who has responsibilities and who sticks to them even when living in totalitarianism. It does not mean that one should become a martyr in a totalitarian regime, but one should have the courage to forsake personal security and to dare enter the public world. The capacity to make judgments of one’s own and of others’ conduct according to one’s conscience should serve as a guidance in all adverse conditions. This also means that entering the public world involves considering others in their diverse roles, for example, whether they commit ‘good’ and ‘bad’ actions, express their will, interfere with the freedom of publics and so on. One might assume that the question of political freedom and of the will would focus on the gap between the ‘social’ and the ‘individual’. Hannah Arendt, however, conceived this dichotomy between political freedom and the will differently.

In contrast to the social sciences, including social psychology, which since their origin struggled with the problem of the ‘individual’ versus the ‘social’ and with their relations (e.g. [Moscovici, 1972](#); [Harré, 1984; 1998](#); [Ritzer and Goodman, 2000](#)), Arendt used the notion of the ‘social’ with some reluctance. In *The Life of the Mind*, we find references to the ‘social’ infrequently, or with a critical undertone. Arendt linked the ‘social’ with the rise of modernity, of which she was highly critical, associating it with the loss of tradition, religion, authority and the disappearance of values (Arendt, 1958; 1961; on Arendt’s concept of authority in education, [Marková, 2016](#)). She conceived modernity as the age of totalitarianism (Nazism and Stalinism), mass society, of the rise of the ‘social’ that

abolished differences between the public and private, the growth of bureaucracy and the misuse of communication (see later). According to Arendt, modernity is the age 'where homogeneity and conformity have replaced plurality and freedom, and where isolation and loneliness have eroded human solidarity and all spontaneous forms of living together' (d'Entreves, 2019). Arendt's 'anti-social' views were part of her critique of the human effort to search for satisfaction in material needs, productivity and consumption. In following Heidegger (1954/1977) in his critique of modern technology that removed poetics from objects and from nature, Arendt went even further in her rejection of markets and technology, accusing them of exploiting resources for consumption and destruction of the Earth.

Having outlined Arendt's critique of modernity which she associated with the 'social', let us turn to the 'political'. Throughout her oeuvre, she talked about politics on a grand scale. To do politics means to engage in world-building in acting morally and ethically, and with total engagement. Arendt's concepts of political action and freedom as she turned to them in the concluding part of *Willing* presupposed that readers had at least some awareness of her general political convictions. Two issues require particular emphasis.

First, every person as an individual possesses some strength, but only when individuals get together, they can act with power. Their togetherness is vital because as soon as individuals disperse and act on their own, power disappears. Human world-building capacities have not only their contemporary relevance, but humans have responsibility for their successors in future generations. Therefore, world-building capacities must start from the basis that guarantees stability for the future in the middle of uncertainties and unpredictable events that threaten these efforts from all sides. In other words, only the plurality of humans creates power and can lead to responsible actions for the benefit of future generations:

The grammar of action: that action is the only human faculty that demands a plurality of men, and the syntax of power: that power is the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related, combine in the act of foundation by virtue of the making and the keeping of promises, which, in the realm of politics, may well be the highest human faculty (Arendt, 1963, p. 175).

Second, and following from the first, 'binding and promising, combining and covenanting are the means by which power is kept in existence' (Arendt, 1963, p. 175). Arendt insists that commitment to 'binding and promising' distinguishes a rebellion against oppression from a true revolution. A rebellion may finish with liberation, but the end of revolution must be the foundation of freedom. It would be a misunderstanding if the distinction between liberation and freedom were not made: 'there is nothing more futile than rebellion and liberation unless they are followed by the constitution of the newly won freedom' (Arendt, 1963, p. 142). The common fate of a rebellion which is not followed by revolution leading to freedom is ineffectiveness, and most rebellions, or so-called revolutions, share such fate. It is fundamental for world-building capacity of humans that they stick to morally binding promises because only these provide stability in uncertainty and unpredictability of action. It is the lack of recognition of the difference between liberation and true freedom that, we shall now see, leads to the abyss of freedom.

### *The social and the authentic self*

Psychology is the study of the mind, which, traditionally, great psychologists, for example, Mark James Baldwin, George Herbert Mead, Lev Vygotsky, among many others, associated with the self, others, consciousness, emotions, reflection on inner states, as well as reflections on individuals' reflections (cf. [Taylor, 1991](#)). Many terms that Hannah Arendt used in *The Life of the Mind* from her perspective as a political scientist and philosopher, are also used by psychologists. Therefore, and as already emphasised, any attempts to understand her concepts and terms from the perspective traditionally applied in psychology could lead us astray because their meanings in these disciplines are likely to differ from those conceived by Arendt.

Arendt's insulation of the political sphere from the concerns of the 'social' is apparent in her concept of the 'social self', in which she followed ideas of Heidegger and Bergson who both spoke about the self in two senses ([Arendt, 1978](#), II, p. 183). Bergson's first sense referred critically to the self which is adapted to social life and language; in a similar way, Heidegger spoke about the opposition between the individual 'Self' and 'They'. Bergson's second sense is 'the self as fundamental', and it corresponds to Heidegger's 'authentic self'. The fundamental or authentic self is spontaneous and creative. According to [Bergson \(1910\)](#), the task of the will is to recover the fundamental self, that is, the concrete, real and spontaneous self, and remove it from the social life and language where every word has a social meaning needed for communication, mitigating against the creative use of language.

The creed of Bergson, Heidegger and Nietzsche was to disconnect the fundamental self of the individual from the social self. In his analysis of Nietzsche, Heidegger claimed: 'in willing, and correspondingly, in not willing, we bring ourselves to light ...Willing always brings the self to itself ...In willing we come towards ourselves as the ones we properly are' ([Heidegger, 1961/1991](#), p. 52; [Arendt, 1978](#), II, p. 183). It is not apparent to what extent Arendt adopted Bergson's, Heidegger's and Nietzsche's positions about the social and authentic selves. However, her concept of the self as the pure spontaneity of willing and as an enduring formation of the human character ([Arendt, 1978](#), I, 213–215) that we discussed above has features of the authentic self in the sense of Heidegger. This issue brings us finally to the question of political action and will, but this requires solving a difficult problem: willing is a spontaneous activity of the individual that is totally unrestricted; it must transform into 'political freedom' and 'political will' where, by definition, the individual is restricted by the political actions of others.

### *Philosophical and political freedom*

Arendt raised the question of political action and freedom in the last pages of *Willing*. She insisted that philosophical freedom differs from political freedom in several vital aspects. First, the former is concerned with *I can* do something, and the latter is concerned with *I will* do something. Second, while philosophical freedom of the will takes place outside communities in the mind of solitary individuals, political freedom of the will has a place 'in the sphere of human plurality' ([Arendt, 1978](#), II, p. 200). Third, in the sphere of human

plurality, one cannot create a political action from a dual relation between I-and-myself or between I and a friend of mine and transform it to a plural We. In other words, you cannot create a plural We from a dialogue: 'Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world, stands in the sharpest possible opposition to the solitary business of thought, which operates in a dialogue between me and myself' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 200). Arendt was critical of some modern philosophers who emphasised the importance of dialogue and communication 'as a guarantee of truth', such as Karl Jaspers or Martin Buber. I understand this position as Arendt's endorsement of Bergson's and Heidegger's critique of the 'social self' because she did not view the problem of willing and of political action as the problem of how to transform the 'individual' into the 'social'. Instead, it is the individuals' commitment to 'binding and promising' that holds political freedom of the will in the sphere of human plurality.

### *Will as a feature of human individuality*

The Roman Christian philosopher Augustine, whom Arendt conceived as the first philosopher of the will, inquired whether free will empowers humans to sin and whether God, who created man is therefore the cause of evil acts. In this context, Augustine raised the question of the 'purpose of the Will' and the 'purpose of man' (Arendt, II, p. 87). He answered this question much later in his book on the *City of God* in 'what could have become the ontological underpinning ...for a philosophy of politics' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 216). God created humans who are aware of their temporality: time and humans were created together. More than that, human togetherness must be based on the solid foundation of '*a beginning*' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 217, Arendt's emphasis). Each human is entirely unique because he/she is born with the capacity of free will and this creates the potentiality for action. Uniqueness of humans arises from *natality*, which signifies the new beginning by giving birth to humans as the willing beings. The will enables original actions, including those in politics. Arendt's preoccupation with *natality* turned her attention to the Biblical legend of the exodus of Israel to Egypt and to the legend of the foundation of Rome. These legends showed that 'the end of old is not necessarily the beginning of the new' (Arendt, II, p. 204), but instead, these legends exposed that humans repeated the same mistakes that they had made in the past. They did not understand the hiatus between liberation and freedom, that is, that the end of the old is not necessarily a path to the new order, but that it could be an illusion of the new. They confused a rebellion with revolution. Although, as Arendt argued elsewhere (see above), a rebellion may finish with liberation, it is 'binding and promising' that is the foundation of freedom and of world-building.

In pursuing this issue, Arendt turned to the founders of the American Republic who had known very well that neither Hebrews in exodus nor Romans in building Rome succeeded doing something new. The founders of the American Republic who had gone to America as refugees and criminals, finished as colonists. While they had arrived in America as asylum seekers and wanted to change the world, they did not act in accordance with promises binding humans together in community. Instead, those men of action created an abyss between being liberated from their own past, and between crafting the

constitution of freedom in their adopted country: they created their 'new' rules from those they had inherited from their past.

Arendt summed up that in being confronted with the riddle of the foundation 'how to re-start time within an inexorable time continuum' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 216), these men of action faced an illusion of starting something new and not recognising their error. They did not solve the problem of re-starting time because as they turned to the past: they repeated errors of their predecessors: they understood new in terms of the old. Freedom survived in political theory only in utopian and unfounded promises of a final 'realm of freedom' which in the end withered away (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 216). This is where *Willing* ends without achieving its aim, and leaves space for *Judging*.

## Volition in political psychology

On the last page of *Willing*, Arendt returned to St Augustine's philosophy of politics expressed in his book on the *City of God*. Augustine's conviction that God created a human being as a temporal creature elevated natality to the central role of human agency. Natality implied that time and man were made together and that humans are aware not only of their beginning but are also aware of their end. The individual's birth is also a confirmation of his/her uniqueness, and the possibility of creating something totally new. However, no guidance for political action ensued from Augustine's philosophy in relation to willing and freedom in politics, and the reader is left with an impasse. Arendt finished *Willing* by expressing her verdict that St Augustine had told us 'no more than that we are doomed to be free by virtue of being born no matter whether we like freedom or abhor its arbitrariness, are "pleased" with it or prefer to escape its awesome responsibility by electing some form of fatalism' (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 217). Despite her resigned tone, political psychology can draw on a multitude of insights that open the path towards theoretical inquiries about willing, freedom and action.

## The 'social' and the 'political' in psychology

Arendt was critical of the 'social' on historical, moral and ethical grounds. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the 'social' became associated with problems such as poverty, inequality and other 'social' evils. In merging the 'social' and 'political', modern European and American revolutions attempted to solve the 'social question'. Marx transformed the 'social question' into a political force. Revolutions will install 'socialism' and 'socialisation', they will remove the ruling class, cease the exploitation of workers, establish 'scientific socialism' and develop economy and technology. All those actions glorified materialistic values. Arendt insisted, instead, that 'the whole record of past revolutions demonstrates beyond doubt that every attempt to solve the social question with political means leads into terror, and that it is terror which sends revolutions to their doom' (Arendt, 1963, p. 112). These considerations that she analysed in detail in 'The social question' (Arendt, 1963, p. 59–114) explain the reasons why she treated the 'political' and the 'social' as separate and even conflicting domains.

In contrast, the 'social' in political psychology commenced from different presuppositions. First, having been derived from social psychology, political psychology rejected individualism as a philosophical doctrine that dominated psychology in its attempt to achieve scientific status for our discipline. Second, the large body of social psychology that orientated itself to political questions, was developing 'social' as the forms of *interaction* between individuals and groups, between groups and institutions, and so on. Political conflicts, international problems, social influence, social representations and identity, racism, sexism, among others, which are a substantial body of political psychology, are viewed as problems to be studied as interactions between opposing parties.

Studies of interactions align social psychology not only with political problems, but also with social anthropology and sociology. However, these interactional problems, although critical of injustice, racism, sexism and degrading of minority groups, have never taken the strict moral and ethical perspective, responsibility and engagement that Arendt advocated so vehemently. The only exceptions were social psychological studies of political dissidents (see later), which drew attention to dissidents' strictest moral positions.

### *Social psychology is a political psychology*

Among social psychologists, Serge Moscovici was one of few who emphasised the problem of 'volonté', (willing). For Moscovici, the question was not how social psychology can contribute to the study of political issues. Social psychology, simply, was a political discipline both in terms of its theories and practice (Faucheux and Moscovici, 1962). Throughout his whole career, Moscovici inquired into political issues in social psychology and explored contradictory features and similarities between these two domains. As a political science, social psychology is concerned with practical problems in 'real life' that explore interdependent oppositions, such as those between the individual and group, personality and culture, or psychology and sociology (Moscovici, 1970, p. 14).

The basis of Moscovici's political psychology was the question: who is the other? This question arose from the political and social events that shook the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as from his personal experiences of surviving the horrors of Nazism, and pogroms on Jews. The question 'who is the other' was his inquiry into how it was possible that Nazi ideology could attract the rational thought of so many people who joined Nazism, and supported atrocities against those who did not endorse Hitler's orders. The question about otherness featured in Moscovici's (1976) studies of minority influence, in the study of dissidence, and later in his explorations of victims, gypsies, racism and forms of discrimination. Therefore, otherness is studied in and through interaction and more specifically, in interactions of conflicts created by active and passive minorities, victims, etc. Interactions are value laden. Different circumstances require different kinds of thinking, judgement, deliberation and choice. All these faculties of the mind are practically utilised in psychology as a political science.

*Arendt and Moscovici on willing.* Disregarding Arendt's and Moscovici's considerable differences with respect to their philosophical views and their perspectives on thinking

and knowing, their views on willing in politics bear some similarities. In both Arendt and Moscovici, willing must transform itself into a political action to achieve changes in the world.

For Arendt, let us repeat, in ‘willing-something, willing changes itself into doing-it’ and by doing it, willing ceases its own activity (Arendt, 1978, II, p. 37). Political action concerns concrete and grand-scale changes that advocate a new beginning, the birth of something new that requires human togetherness based on a solid foundation to guarantee stability for the future.

In contrast, Moscovici’s political action aimed at understanding different kinds of interactions between the self and others; it focused on conflicts created by minorities, including minorities of one, aiming either at destabilising the existing regime or changing it. Political action could succeed only if the minority became a decisive force by creating a conflict that expressed a willing, rigid style and determination to change the status quo.

Perhaps the most important difference between Arendt’s and Moscovici’s ‘willing’ is how the two scholars conceived of ‘human plurality’ in relation to willing and political action. Arendt insisted that political freedom and the will can take place only ‘in the sphere of human plurality’. Changes in the world happen only by executing the power of human togetherness, while political actions by solitary individuals are destined to fail. Whenever people live together, they create a ‘We’, and this togetherness requires consent, obedience and following rules of the community. Communities are guided by laws, and these necessarily restrict the freedom of individuals; they are ‘the faceless “They”’ and individuals are ready for political action only as members of communities (Arendt, II, p. 201). Arendt pursued her project by claiming that different forms of human pluralities share only one trait that is common to them all: it is the fact of their genesis, that is, the point in time and some reason why people start referring to themselves as We. Arendt turned again to *natality* which signifies the new beginning by creating the We that gives the ground to political action. In talking about ‘human plurality’ and ‘communities’, Arendt’s focus was on loyalty, organisation, structure and rules that guide the community’s existence, rather than on internal interactions among members. Let us suggest that the term ‘human plurality’ is Arendt’s substitute for the ‘social’.

Moscovici explored willing as a multifaceted activity that did not exclude willing as a force of single individuals. Moscovici’s focus was on interaction between individuals or groups and their social environment (communities, societies and institutions) and through interactions, the will manifested itself in different forms. For example, he explored willing that took place between minorities and majorities, in single individuals and in masses where willing displayed itself as a ‘collective will’.

*Willing in different forms.* By minorities, Moscovici meant groups that were denied autonomy and responsibility by other groups, mainly by those in power. Throughout history, minorities tried to change their status by means of their rigid behavioural styles expressing their willing by firm conviction, consistency and unfailing repetition of relevant actions. Studies of minorities’ innovation and social change formed a great part of Moscovici’s work in history, politics, social psychology and ecology. For example, he repeatedly posed Gibbon’s (1872) question as to how it was possible for a small group of Christians



to become a Church and achieve what had seemed to be an impossible change in Roman history. The will to achieve their goal was pursued by consistent actions of a minority and led to the Christians' victory in the most difficult situation (Moscovici & Marková, 2000).

Moscovici argued that behavioural style was equally important in the political activities of minorities of one, that is, of dissidents (Moscovici, 1979a, 1979b, 1997). Dissidents, such as Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov, Alexei Navalny, Jan Patočka and Václav Havel among many others, display moral and intellectual strength by their inflexible and consistent activities in their struggles with the political regime. They make themselves extremely visible, they unfailingly repeat their actions and avoid compromise by their courageous stance. The conscience of solitary opposers or dissidents does not allow them to compromise or to submit themselves to the regime. They are persecuted not only as individuals, but by their activities, they endanger their families and friends because the political regime is prepared to persecute everybody who is in some way connected with the perpetrator. While their conscience dictates dissidents to be truthful to their mission, they must weigh up the contrasting responsibilities between their conscience and people who are endangered by their political commitments.

Dissidents, the minorities of one, that is, solitary individuals, usually do not carry out a revolution in Arendt's sense because, as she argued, changes in the world are produced by actions of human togetherness, whilst political actions by solitary individuals have no chance to succeed. However, the argument may follow a different route. Activities of solitary individuals are dialogical activities: they are directed both at the acting individual and at the political regime. Through their activities, solitary dissidents transform both themselves and others. Dissidents are rewarded for their activities by having the experience of flawless conscience which is strengthened even more by their convictions. 'Others' are also influenced by the dissidents' activities. The term 'others' includes several kinds of people:

- Those living under the same oppressive regime as do the dissidents, whether they are active co-players or passive observers;
- The regime's representatives and leaders of the oppressive regime; and
- International audiences.

The regime's response to dissidents is co-determined by outside international pressure, by the regime's fear of the threat of local masses, as well as by its conflicting political commitments. In my view, even if dissidents' activities do not lead to rebellions or revolutions, all involved parties are necessarily influenced and changed by dissidents' political actions and provide resources for future political actions.

While dissidents, in transforming 'willing' into political action may become leaders of oppressed masses because of their unfailing moral stance, mass movements may give rise to leaders whose charismatic power has nothing to do with morality. Instead, charismatic power can be based on the leader's will. Leaders such as Mao, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini and Trump, have been successful not only by bringing masses under their control, but by inspiring in them their own will:

When individuals come together ... they mix, fuse, radically change, acquire a shared nature which stiles their own, are subject to a collective will which silences their own... Irrationality has been removed from science and technology only to become concentrated in the area of political power (Moscovici, 1985, p. 15 and p. 33).

Let us remind ourselves that Arendt insisted that it was quite possible for humans to live without thinking, but such a life would be not only meaningless, but it would not be fully alive. 'Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers' (Arendt, 1978, I, p. 191). Although thinking does not do society much good, it provides every thinking person the possibility to live with oneself and to be never alone.

Moscovici pointed out that under the influence of leaders who bring humans under control, humans become automatons or sleepwalkers, bending their wills under the influence of the leader incapable of reasoning but able to commit all reprehensible acts (Moscovici, 1985, p. 88). Thus, in Moscovici's conception, automatic thinking and automatic willing are part of the same activity. If leaders who are incapable of reasoning have an irresistible need to go forward, no internal or external force stops them as if 'pushed along by indomitable will, the will of the collectivity itself' (Moscovici, 1985, p. 125). The exaltation of collective will is strengthened in participations in spectacular ceremonies in which masses show their faith and commitment to the leader, and where the collective "we" speaks through his individual "I" (Moscovici, 1985, p. 17). In this process, nothing can move the leader's will. If Trump's followers believe that elections were stolen from him, this belief cannot be shaken by any arguments or by any evidence. It is a feature of what Moscovici (1993) called 'irresistible beliefs'. In this case, individuals voluntarily give away their freedom and submit themselves to the leader's will. The leader does not need to appeal to ethics and responsibility; whatever he says, masses accept on face value without thinking, evaluation or judgement. The collective will become further supported by mass communication and social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.). The voice or the word of the leader is enough to devastate national heritage and institutions such as the Capitol in Washington, and self-appointed judges have no problem in destroying statues or committing crimes against public property. Humans have not learned from Arendt's insights that a revolt or rebellion is a totally different phenomenon than the construction of freedom.

## Conclusion

What does political psychology learn from Hannah Arendt about willing? It is unlikely that psychology would adopt Arendt's conception of willing as an activity separated from thinking, judging, trusting, knowing, feeling and other psychological faculties of the mind that relate the self to others. But while the will cannot be transformed into a political action without engaging other activities of the mind, political psychology has not yet explored the joint participation and interdependence of these activities.

Hannah Arendt brought to attention the fact that willing as a vital psychological faculty of humans has been rarely studied. Political psychology has not explicitly conceptualised willing and volition, although it studied psychological phenomena such as resilience to

political pressure, motivation to act and fights for social recognition of minorities. Psychology has usually substituted the notions of 'willing' or 'volition' by other words, such as 'a desire', 'an intention' or 'a motive'. For example, Moscovici's term 'volonté' that he used frequently in his book *L'age des foules* (Moscovici, 1981/1985) appears in the English translation as 'will', 'wish', 'desire' and 'want' because 'will' is not conceived as a well-defined psychological concept. Lack of interest in willing in psychology contrasts with psychology's attention to thinking, where many books on this topic have been published over decades (e.g. Humphrey, Bruner, Bartlett and Kahneman).

One may suggest that there could be value in re-examining the self in two variations inspired by Bergson and Heidegger and followed by Arendt, that is, a spontaneous and a social self. I do not mean that these two components should be treated as two different versions of the self. Instead, I suggest that the study of the self as a creative and imaginative phenomenon focusing on will could be given more attention in dialogical conceptions of the self, which places the emphasis on the self/other interdependence.

Arendt's concept of willing suggests the path of its exploration both as a pure spontaneity turned into action and so interrupting the chain of habitual events, and as an enduring formation of human character. Both components of willing create a conflict within the self as well as between the self and various others. Such conflicts call for the weighting up of opposing responsibilities and engagements that have impact not only for the immediate circumstances, but also for the future implications of one's actions. The emphasis on moral and ethical principles in political actions is the most inspiring feature of Arendt's concept of willing to be developed in psychology.

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